# Chapter 20
# Underprivileged Children and COVID–19:
## Visamo Kids Case Studies in Ahmedabad Shelter

**Sudeshna Jayant Bhojia**
*Visamo Kids Foundation, India*

## ABSTRACT

*The pandemic has disrupted lives and is continuing to affect the right to education across the world; a shelter home housing underprivileged kids in the state of Gujarat is no exception. The crisis that hit the world unannounced, and led to hurried closing down of the educational institutions for indefinite periods. After a hiatus, a new mode of imparting education was sought to be adapted –the online mode. And the inequalities in access to education were striking. With online education becoming an only way to maintain continuity, the fragility of the public education system and institutions that were under funded became vivid. The pressure on the parents, educators, and administrators increased manifold. A tiny section of students at a shelter home in Ahmedabad—the Visamo Kids Foundation—endeavoring to access quality education in the finest English medium schools under RTE, were marginalized and deprived of their right to access to quality education.*

## INTRODUCTION

"I missed my friends a lot. Since childhood, we have been together and suddenly got separated for almost two years. I can live without parents but not without my friends now." A young Jiya who dreams of becoming a physiotherapist describes her feelings sitting in her room at Visamo Kids Foundation. She adds, "We are having a lot of fun as we are together after almost two years." India has been one of the hardest hit nations by the Covid-19 pandemic. The total recorded cases have crossed 43 million in the United States. India also has recorded the highest number of deaths caused due to Covid19, which has now crossed 520,000 (*Coronavirus (COVID-19) Cases,* n.d.). While children have been observed

to have lesser health risks, the pandemic seriously impacts their well-being. The harmful effect is expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, neighborhoods, and those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations (UNSDP). There are several childcare homes taking care of underprivileged children across the length and breadth of India. This study revolves around the personal experiences shared by the children studying in various top-notch schools of Ahmedabad facilitated by an NGO, Visamo Kids Foundation.

## BACKGROUND

During the lockdown in 2020, the schools closed abruptly, and all the children were at the shelter home. Maintaining social distancing as per the norms was becoming a challenge. The non-residential staff found it difficult to reach the workplace owing to the imposition of a curfew. The institution was closed down, and kids were indefinitely sent back to their homes. From mid-April onwards, one of our partnering schools, DPS, Bopal, started their online classes, and soon enough, the other schools started virtual classrooms. We were faced with the challenge of providing access to online education to our students, who are now in remote villages in Gujarat. With the support of local NGOs, family members of the children, community members, Panchayats, and youth groups, somehow, access was ensured, though not for all.

The students of VKF are enrolled across 20+ schools under four boards (ICSE, CBSE, GSEB, and IB). Every school has a different pedagogy with diversity in the online platforms used. Access to a device, access to time for the use of the device for dedicated use for online education, access to a strong internet service, access to privacy, safety, access to an environment that is conducive to studies, access to warm meals and sanitation and many more factors started to impact the education of these kids. Gradually, as and when the situation started improving and depending on the case-to-case assessment of situational factors, feedback provided by teachers at school and of VKF, and recommendations made by the counselor, we started bringing the students back to the shelter home from September 2020 onwards. By January 2021, 14 kids were back at home. The maximum number of students was called back by mid-2021; after Diwali in 2021, 90% were on campus. Finally, in 2022, when the new session was to start, all the students were on campus. During their stay at their homes, the students experienced myriad life situations, and we have captured select stories by documenting 12 case studies. The names have been changed to protect their identities.

### Context

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by a virus, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (*COVID 19,* 2022). The Covid-19 disease has been registered globally since its onset in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The mass spread of this disease led to what came to be known as the Covid-19 pandemic. The world has changed post-pandemic compared to before the advent of this disease. Nearly half of the world's 3.3 billion global workforce risk losing their livelihoods (*Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems,* 2020). The loss of an unprecedented number of human lives and the trauma following those losses has been enormous. This report intends to introduce the readers to the hardships faced, the social and mental impact of the pandemic, and the preference and high spirits of underprivileged children living in childcare homes. The childcare home in focus for this study is Visamo Kids Foundation, Ahmedabad. Visamo Kids Foundation

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